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**AN OVERVIEW OF DECISION TABLE
LITERATURE
1982-2000**

by

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An Overview of decision table literature 1982-2000

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Abstract

The present report contains an overview of the literature on decision tables since its origin. The goal is to analyze the dissemination of decision tables in different areas of knowledge, countries and languages, especially showing those that present the most interest on decision table use. In the first part a description of the scope of the overview is given. Next, the classification results by topic are explained. An abstract and some keywords are included for each reference, normally provided by the authors. In some cases own comments are added. The purpose of these comments is to show where, how and why decision tables are used. Other examined topics are the theoretical or practical feature of each document, as well as its origin country and language. Finally, the main body of the paper consists of the ordered list of publications with abstract, classification and comments.

Keywords: decision tables, expert systems, decision support systems, knowledge representation

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this work is to give an overview of the literature on decision tables since its origin. Our interest is concentrated on analyzing the integration of different areas of knowledge and decision tables.

Originally, decision tables offered a technique used to support programming. The main interest was concentrated on the efficient conversion of the tables into program code. Afterwards, they became largely used in different domains, and the interest shifted to the design of methods for decision table construction, being used mainly for knowledge representation and decision support system (as will be shown later).

The present report is structured as follows. First, a description of the scope of the overview is provided in section 2. Next, the classification results by topic are explained in section 3. An abstract and some keywords are included for each reference, normally provided by the authors. In some cases own comments are added. The purpose of these comments is to show where, how and why decision tables are used. The examined topics are exposed in section 4, as their publication year, the area, the theoretical or practical feature of each document, its origin country and its language. Following in section 5, some conclusions about this work are added. Finally in section 6, the main body of the paper is attached, consisting of the ordered list of publications with abstract, classification and comments.

2. Scope of the Overview

A specific remark concerns the size of the literature related to decision tables. The overview consists of about eight hundred references. Approximately half of them -corresponding to the articles of the last two decades- have been annexed here. However, this figure is far from exhaustive. This is not surprising given the limited size of bibliographies making it impossible to consult all documents. Even electronic search facilities (e.g. search engines on the World Wide Web) are not able to find all documents, because not all of them have been indexed. Thus, the actual number of documents discussing decision tables will be much higher.

However, even taking into account the above-mentioned remarks, an effort to capture and organize the most important documents related to decision tables has been done. This compilation of documents shows that decision tables involve a broad range of problem solving matters going as far as transport or chemistry. A classification by areas is needed when somebody aims at coping with decision tables because it allows a better overview. The results of the research will be analyzed in the section 3.

To have a better understanding of the evolution of the quantity of literature concerning decision tables, the references are also classified per year. The following graph (fig. 1) presents the results.

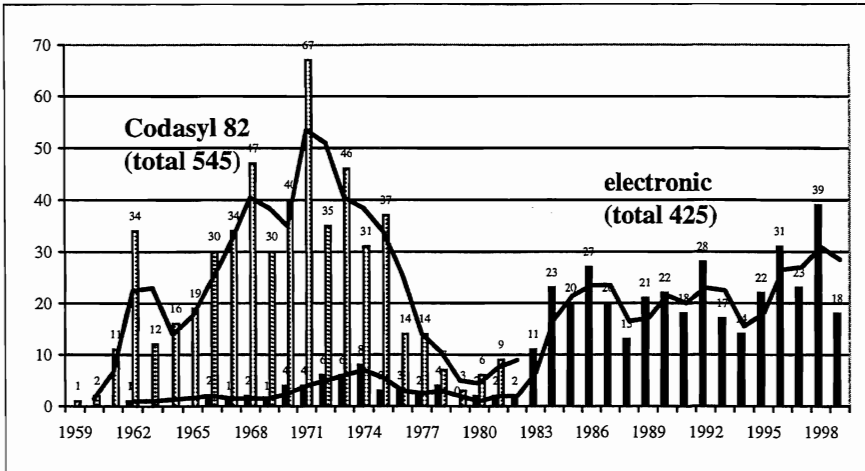


Fig. 1: Number of publications per year

Figure 1 shows publications on decision tables throughout the past forty years. The two colors correspond to two kinds of documents, where red points to references we have found in the gray literature, and blue are documents we have located after an electronic research. The first ones have been extracted from a report that the international Decision Table Task Group of Codasyl made in 1982, in an attempt to understand why the decision table had not gained more interest both within and external to the data processing community. They concluded that:

- The early decision table processors and preprocessors were quite inefficient at a time when minimizing the use of computer memory was important.
- Powerful decision table constructs have not been incorporated into commercial compilers which limited their availability to the general programmer.
- An assumption has been proliferated that decision tables are easy to use, when in fact this is true only after someone has been trained in their effective use.
- Few programs have been training people in the effective use of decision tables. Consequently students often receive insufficient education in the depth and scope of using single decision tables and multiple table systems.

Following with the graph, in the first years, publications are especially oriented to decision tables as an interesting tool for programming. The period 1962-75 was very productive with an average of 30 publications per year, and a record of 67 publications in 1971.

The total number of publications we have referenced is 970, 545 related to the Codasyl report and 425 to the electronic research.

The number of publications over the years 1984 to 1999 is more or less constant, with an average of around 20 per year. The only exceptions are 1988 and 1994. We are convinced that these deviations are coincidental. The smaller number of publications from 1999 on can be explained by the earlier remark, namely that not all references have been indexed yet, which is especially true for new ones. Similar observations, but to on smaller extent hold for 1983 and earlier where publications may not have appeared in indexing mechanisms because of their age.

In short, we can confirm that publications are rising and there is evidence to confirm the global interest of decision tables in several domains as we can see in the next section.

Regarding the application area the oldest documents were dated in the beginning of the sixties and most of them were related to the programming area, see for example the references [91], [255] or [270]. Later, in the seventies there was more interest for the algorithms area, see for instance publications [204], [338] or [365]. At last, from the eighties on the focus shifted towards the knowledge representation and application areas, as in [40], [71] or [113].

3. Classification results

The present section contains the results of our electronic research. To simplify the exposition the classification has been split into three blocks: first according to the application area, next to the nature of the references and finally with respect to the country and language.

3.1. Classification according to the application area

A striking observation from the decision table literature is the diversity of application areas: from expert systems to production systems (possibly automated systems that control the flow of products through the factory), from medicine to legal matters. A wide variety of application areas has been encountered.

The area that seems to be the most discussed is “Expert systems, decision support systems and knowledge representation, artificial intelligence” (see fig. 2). This is comprehensible because, first of all, expert systems have been discussed a lot, and secondly decision tables are very well suited for use in expert systems. Expert systems and decision support systems are systems that help the user evaluate a situation and take a decision, on the basis of some form of logic representation that must be used in order to reach a conclusion. Decision tables appear to be very well suited for this kind of situations (conditional logic), which is shown extensively in the referenced literature. In more recent years there has been a concentration of efforts on knowledge representation because its applications in real world have been satisfactory.

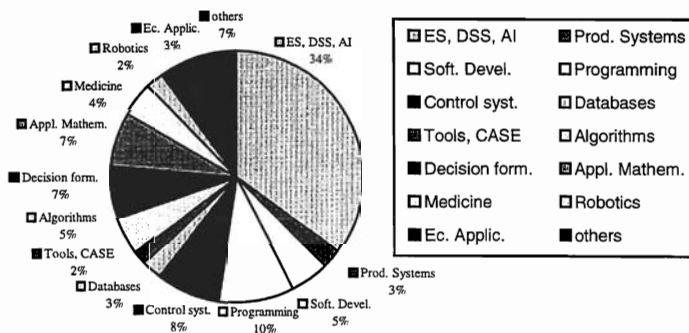


Fig. 2: Classification according to application area

Figure 2 reviews reported research areas on decision tables. As witnessed by the graph, a wide variety of areas is found. More technology related areas (programming, control systems, ...) occupy the priority areas though.

Sometimes, individual contributions concentrate on applications in more than one area. One of these areas is usually the above mentioned knowledge representation, and the other a diagnostic problems area such as medicine, economics or robotics.

3.2. Classification according to the nature of the references

The results according to the nature of the references are well-balanced: 96 documents are theoretical, while 94 others have a more practical nature. They represent 23 and 22% respectively of the total. 59 references are both theoretical and practical and represent 14% of total. The nature of the remaining references (41%) is unknown.

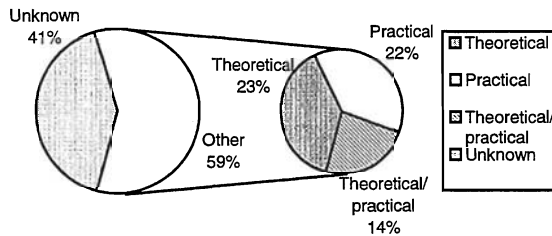


Fig. 3: Classification according to the nature of the references

3.3. Classification according to country and language

Another classification that is presented here is the classification according to country and language. The latter is easy: most of the documents are in English (see fig. 4). They represent 85% of total. This is perfectly logical, given the worldwide use of English as publication language. The number of references in languages other than English is marginal, except perhaps for Dutch (10%). The data may however be influenced by the sources of the references. An important source of the overview was in fact the “Excerpta Informatica” database of the Catholic University of Brabant (Tilburg, Holland). Given that this is a Dutch database, it is understandable that Dutch documents will be better represented. Another source is DBLP and some references have this codification. It is a bibliography server maintained by the Department of Computer Science of the University of Trier (Germany).

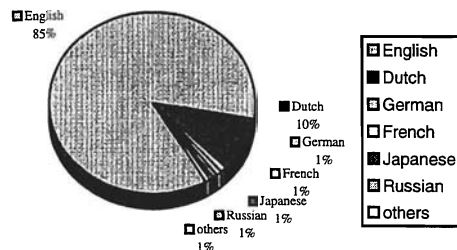


Fig. 4: Classification according to language

The classification variety is larger when classifying the documents according to country. In fig. 5, we can see the evident importance of the United States as country of origin (47% of total), followed by Belgium (9%) and Holland (7%). The number of referenced countries is far larger than the number of referenced languages. This is partly explained by the fact that some countries use the same language (Canada and USA; Holland and Belgium), but also by the fact that some documents are published in a language other than the one normally used in the country of origin, e.g. Finland, India, Israel and Italy. Another reason is that the main editorials require the use of English as language of submitting manuscripts.

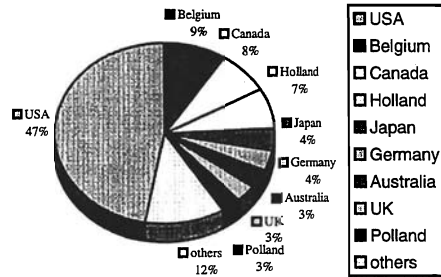


Fig. 5: Classification according to country

Finally, we include a mention to the terminology. The searching tasks were further complicated because the terminology in decision tables is not always the same. Sometimes decision tables are presented under other names, such as decision diagrams (as in [28] or [33]), propositional expert systems (as in [51]), decision-table data structure (as in [180]), Tabular Rule-Based System (as in [184]), decision-making table (as in [245] or [273]), decision grid chart (as in [261]), Tabular Knowledge Bases (as in [332] or [355]), decision table-based controller (as in [334]), Tabular Knowledge Systems (as in [363]), Tabular Knowledge-Based Framework (as in [390]), decision-table-based algorithm (as in [416]), etc.

4. Classification

In order to make the consultation easier, the list of publications is numbered and ordered by authors. This will be consulted in the fourth section. To classify the references each document is provided with some concepts over topics that are assigned. Thus, publications are categorized according to the following five topics: application area, character theoretical/practical, year of publication, origin country and publication language.

Further, an overview of the references assigned to each concept in each topic is presented. The numbers point to the references. Some references appear more than once in the classification according to application area, as they relate to multiple areas, for instance reference 7 is categorized in the both areas of the System development and the Expert Systems.

4.1. Classification according to application area

- *Expert systems, decision support systems and knowledge representation, artificial intelligence:* 190
[3][7][8][16][21][23][25][27][28][29][30][34][42][47][51][52][53][54][55][58][59][60][65][71][72][77][78][79][80][81][84][90][92][94][104][109][111][113][114][117][118][120][124][125]

[127][128][130][131][136][142][144][145][146][150][151][152][153][161][162][163][166][168][172][173][181][182][183][184][185][189][190][191][199][200][201][202][203][205][206][210][214][215][219][223][231][232][236][238][240][247][248][249][250][251][259][261][262][265][266][273][275][282][289][294][296][298][302][303][306][309][310][313][314][319][320][322][323][326][327][332][333][335][336][339][340][341][344][345][347][348][349][352][353][354][356][357][358][359][360][361][362][363][364][369][373][374][378][379][380][381][382][383][384][385][386][387][388][389][390][391][392][393][394][395][396][397][398][399][400][401][402][403][404][405][406][407][408][409][410][411][412][415][416][419][420][421][422][423][424][425]

- *Production systems, production planning, process planning, product development: 14*
[6][40][62][85][92][131][134][148][236][315][323][327][328][413]
- *System development, software development: 27*
[8][11][33][37][48][56][61][87][94][95][106][119][139][165][192][197][202][216][221][230][258][272][274][279][280][325][331]
- *Programming, programming languages: 54*
[4][18][41][48][63][70][73][74][86][91][99][102][104][135][138][140][147][149][157][168][169][170][176][177][178][187][188][194][207][208][198][211][212][220][225][237][253][254][255][256][257][269][270][271][277][289][295][297][311][312][321][324][366][372]
- *Data communication, telecommunication: 7*
[14][68][119][143][160][226][368]
- *Control systems: 44*
[2][7][27][36][38][39][45][46][52][88][93][96][112][115][122][125][163][166][171][186][193][201][217][219][222][229][242][244][264][265][268][278][280][285][292][293][301][314][315][334][337][343][415][418]
- *Databases, file management: 14*
[4][14][45][55][66][71][124][148][190][218][252][277][360][416]
- *Tools, CASE tools, preprocessors: 9*
[1][5][6][76][126][134][304][305][336]
- *Algorithms: 27*
[67][75][103][110][140][155][158][159][174][175][180][195][204][224][231][239][241][244][263][267][290][300][329][338][365][375][416]
- *Decision formalisms: 36*
[22][24][32][37][57][61][73][82][83][87][101][102][105][108][135][167][179][196][198][218][227][243][244][258][261][264][276][299][300][330][346][350][351][354][355][367]
- *Applied mathematics: 38*
[9][10][13][23][26][27][30][43][44][45][64][70][88][98][123][137][152][154][155][156][160][164][179][228][234][241][259][267][268][284][285][286][291][317][318][320][413][414]
- *Medicine: 24*
[12][17][35][50][90][100][107][121][132][133][146][213][215][246][281][287][288][298][299][306][307][308][376][377]
- *Legal matters: 7*
[19][235][275][348][356][358][370]
- *Construction, mining: 7*
[31][49][78][89][129][214][339]
- *Transport: 6*
[20][64][123][259][260][283]
- *Nuclear power: 4*
[13][116][148][245]

- *Military applications: 3*
[40][125][230]
- *Chemistry: 6*
[15][96][292][301][309][310]
- *Robotics: 12*
[27][47][97][109][201][219][233][251][283][357][362][415]
- *Economic applications: 15*
[24][85][96][104][154][162][172][174][214][219][231][315][322][326][330]

4.2. Classification according to character

- *Theoretical: 96*
[2][18][21][27][28][34][38][39][42][43][44][52][65][66][70][71][73][82][103][109][118][123][127][128][143][153][154][156][160][161][163][166][167][168][179][180][191][197][199][201][216][218][219][222][223][224][226][228][231][233][234][242][243][244][245][251][257][264][265][280][285][286][293][299][300][306][309][314][315][316][317][319][320][325][334][346][349][350][352][354][355][358][359][363][365][378][379][389][390][391][392][414][415][419][422][425]
- *Practical: 94*
[1][3][5][6][12][16][17][19][23][25][29][31][49][54][58][69][76][77][78][79][85][94][95][96][97][100][104][105][106][108][114][115][119][120][123][125][126][144][145][182][183][184][200][207][210][215][217][227][230][238][246][247][248][249][250][252][262][266][272][277][279][282][283][287][288][292][296][301][302][303][304][305][307][308][310][322][326][330][337][347][348][351][355][367][369][372][373][374][376][377][416][417][421][424]
- *Theoretical / practical: 59*
[4][7][9][11][13][14][15][26][32][33][34][45][46][47][51][55][64][80][81][89][98][111][112][113][116][122][135][142][146][151][155][164][169][172][193][206][232][239][240][241][259][267][268][273][275][281][284][298][318][331][339][342][353][360][361][363][412][420][423]

4.3. Classification according to year

- *1962: 1*
[255]
- *1966: 2*
[91][270]
- *1967: 1*
[271]
- *1968: 2*
[110][136]
- *1969: 1*
[89]
- *1970: 4*
[106][149][207][208]
- *1971 4:*
[256][257][311][338]
- *1972: 6*
[59][187][204][225][365][417]
- *1973: 6*
[60][99][138][157][188][329]

- 1974: 8
[41][158][170][220][237][253][254][312]
- 1975: 3
[159][313][321]
- 1976: 3
[177][295][372]
- 1977: 2
[75][211]
- 1978: 4
[140][174][194][212]
- 1980: 2
[195][297]
- 1981: 2
[141][169]
- 1982: 2
[175][198]
- 1983: 11
[38][48][71][112][113][139][176][202][324][334][341]
- 1984: 23
[9][18][22][36][40][49][56][57][83][84][92][103][117][124][131][167][168][178][323][331][333]
[366][423]
- 1985: 20
[24][77][79][85][93][134][135][148][154][172][173][192][197][243][289][290][294][325][328]
[337]
- 1986: 27
[4][6][39][68][82][96][101][105][107][118][137][147][171][196][222][226][229][238][242][244]
[278][300][316][327][345][367][413]
- 1987: 20
[10][20][44][58][62][78][87][203][214][234][236][260][261][264][268][269][273][291][376][419]
- 1988: 13
[14][30][32][37][63][94][102][199][206][241][275][350][371]
- 1989: 21
[5][17][50][61][104][115][125][132][142][155][189][216][218][239][263][280][293][298][317]
[368][416]
- 1990: 22
[25][53][54][55][73][74][116][120][152][156][209][217][230][252][276][279][318][326][339][340]
[378][418]
- 1991: 18
[95][98][111][119][150][160][179][205][210][224][227][231][235][277][283][322][346][375]
- 1992: 28
[2][11][12][13][33][43][51][70][86][88][97][146][164][185][215][228][233][258][272][274][282]
[284][285][301][315][330][420][422]
- 1993: 17
[45][64][69][114][123][165][221][246][259][267][288][307][320][332][336][348][358]
- 1994: 14
[19][72][90][129][133][143][190][247][287][308][351][353][359][424]

- *1995: 22*
[1][8][76][108][126][145][161][223][248][296][302][304][305][352][354][360][361][370][377]
[402][408][410]
- *1996: 31*
[27][46][80][153][163][181][182][183][191][193][265][266][303][309][310][319][362][363][374]
[379][380][381][382][387][399][400][401][403][409]
- *1997: 23*
[3][7][35][121][122][144][186][200][213][219][240][250][292][306][314][355][364][369][373]
[390][398][404][414]
- *1998: 39*
[16][23][28][29][31][34][42][65][66][67][81][109][162][166][184][201][232][281][286][342][343]
[347][349][357][383][384][385][386][388][389][391][394][395][396][397][405][406][407][411]
- *1999: 18*
[15][47][52][100][127][130][180][245][249][251][262][299][335][344][356][393][412][421]
- *2000: 3*
[128][151][392]

4.4. Classification according to country

- *Australia: 9*
[51][52][53][54][55][76][106][366][367]
- *Belgium: 26*
[23][120][194][195][210][246][347][348][349][351][352][353][354][355][357][358][359][360][361]
[362][363][365][379][389][390][391]
- *Canada: 22*
[3][44][87][123][144][145][182][183][200][247][248][249][250][259][266][302][303][373][374]
[376][420][424]
- *China: 4*
[88][361][416][422]
- *Germany: 10*
[49][96][104][111][125][134][151][291][298][325]
- *Finland: 2*
[116][260]
- *France: 5*
[36][97][267][268][340]
- *Hong Kong: 1*
[227]
- *India: 6*
[26][215][216][262][264][265]
- *Israel: 2*
[98][228]
- *Italy: 3*
[69][71][82]
- *Japan: 11*
[115][124][217][218][233][278][284][309][310][331][335]
- *Yugoslavia: 1*
[28]

- *Holland: 20*
[63][68][101][102][104][165][189][190][196][197][198][199][205][220][235][257][344][346][369]
[392]
- *Poland: 8*
[239][242][243][244][317][318][320][334]
- *Romania: 1*
[73]
- *Russia: 5*
[13][164][191][283][419]
- *Spain: 1*
[17]
- *Taiwan: 1*
[45]
- *UK: 9*
[5][89][119][149][168][207][252][279][326]
- *USA: 132*
[1][2][4][6][7][8][10][11][12][14][15][16][19][23][25][27][28][29][31][33][34][38][39][40][42][43][46]
[47][50][56][57][61][64][65][66][70][77][78][79][80][81][84][85][86][92][93][94][100][103][105]
[109][111][112][113][114][117][118][121][122][128][131][132][133][135][137][142][143][146][148]
[149][153][154][155][156][160][163][171][172][173][174][175][176][177][178][179][180][202]
[203][206][207][208][211][212][212][213][214][219][220][223][224][229][230][232][234][236][240]
[241][245][251][265][273][274][276][277][282][285][286][287][288][289][290][292][293][296][299]
[300][301][304][305][306][307][308][314][315][316][319][322][323][327][328][330][333][337][339]
[341][375][377][378][413][417][418][421][423]
- *South Korea: 1*
[280]

4.5. Classification according to language

- *Chinese: 2*
[88] [422]
- *German: 4*
[49][96][291][325]
- *English: 339*
[1][2][3][4][5][6][7][8][9][10][11][12][14][15][16][17][18][19][20][21][23][25][26][27][28][29][31]
[33][34][36][38][39][40][41][42][43][44][45][46][47][48][50][51][52][54][55][56][57][58][59][60]
[61][62][64][65][66][69][70][71][73][74][76][77][78][79][80][81][82][83][84][85][86][87][89][91]
[92][93][94][95][98][99][103][104][105][106][109][110][111][112][113][114][116][117][118][119]
[120][121][122][123][124][125][126][127][128][131][132][133][134][135][136][138][142][143][144]
[145][146][148][149][151][153][154][155][156][157][158][159][160][161][162][163][166][167][168]
[169][172][173][174][175][176][177][178][179][180][181][182][183][183][184][187][190][191][193]
[194][195][198][199][200][201][202][203][204][206][207][210][211][214][215][216][217][218][219]
[220][222][223][224][225][226][227][228][229][230][231][232][233][234][236][237][238][239]
[240][241][242][243][244][245][247][248][249][250][251][252][253][254][255][256][259][260][262]
[264][265][266][267][268][269][270][271][272][273][274][276][277][278][279][280][281][282][284]
[285][286][287][288][289][290][292][293][294][296][297][298][299][300][301][302][303][304][305]
[306][307][308][311][312][313][314][315][316][317][318][319][321][322][323][324][326][327]
[328][329][330][331][332][334][335][337][338][339][341][342][347][348][349][351][352][353][354]
[355][357][358][359][360][361][362][363][365][366][367][368][371][372][373][374][376][377][378]
[379][389][390][391][392][412][414][415][416][417][419][420][421][423][424][425]

- *French*: 3
[97][100][340]
- *Japanese*: 3
[115][309][310]
- *Dutch*: 17
[23][63][68][101][165][189][196][205][220][235][246][257][275][344][346][350][369]
- *Russian*: 3
[13][164][283]
- *Slovenian*: 1
[28]

5. Conclusions

The purpose of this paper was to analyze the dissemination of decision tables in different areas of knowledge, countries and languages, as well as to determine the orientation (practical or theoretical) of the references.

In a first step, the interest was concentrated in offering a description of the scope of the overview. Then, its evolution was examined. The overview consisted of nearly thousand references throughout the past forty years. We observe that publications are rising and there is evidence to confirm the global interest of decision tables in several domains.

It was also shown how decision tables provided a very useful support for expert systems construction and verification, becoming the area of main interest. This is confirmed by the extensive literature referring hereto. Decision tables appear to be very well suited to conditional logic situations, where expert systems are based.

The results according to the nature (theoretical/practical) of the references are well-balanced: 96 documents are theoretical, while 94 others have a more practical nature.

According to country and language, English documents represent 85% of total, which is perfectly logical, given the worldwide use of English as publication language, but classification variety is larger when classifying the documents according to country. The importance of the United States as country of origin is striking (47% of total), followed by Belgium (9%) and Holland (7%).

6. Overview of the literature

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